WHAT WAS HIS ANSWER?

"Why, sister, isn't this our birthday?"

"Yes, I suppose it is."

"I declare it completely slipped my mind, so much happening! I never failed to stir up a cake. Did you remember it?"

"O, yes, I remembered it. I couldn't well forget it with such a fine present coming to us."

The sisters were sitting on either side of a wide open fire in high-back chairs. So exactly alike were they in form and feature and dress that only one who knew them well could have told them apart.

Their fingers were busy knitting. Jane's work was a scarlet and orange afghan. Hulda was rounding off the toe of a pair of gray woolen stockings.

In the center of the room by the claw-legged table a young girl sat, apparently reading, though her eyes rested on the two figures before the fire.

"What present did you get, Jane?"

Hulda stopped her work and looked over her glasses. Jane smiled and nodded her head toward the young girl seated by the table.

The tall clock that stood on the winding staircase at the end of the long drawing room struck 1. The three started and looked around, and the girl threw down her book and sprang to her feet, laughing.

"Old Father Time has come to life," she said. "He objects to our being so quiet. Come, Aunt Hulda, let us do something to celebrate Aunt Jane's birthday. Aunt Jane, what shall we do to celebrate Aunt Hulda's birthday?"

The eyes of the two elder ladies were still fixed on the clock and they made no answer. The girl came and stood on the hearth rug, and, stopping, took Jane's face between her small, plump hands and kissed her. Then, catching up the afghan, she ran down the room and up the stair and threw it over the face of the clock. The sisters laughed merrily.

"That was the hour we two came into the world," said Hulda. "You can't say but it was rather startling to have the old clock ring out that hour. It hasn't made a move to my knowledge since you went away, Amy."

"O, well, it just happened, Aunt Hulda," Amy answered with the happy carelessness of youth. "Besides, it isn't 1 o'clock now. It is only 7:30." She danced across the room and seated herself at the piano. "Come, Aunt Jane, let us sing something."

"Why, child, I can't sing!"

"You used to sing beautifully."

"I'm afraid you forget that we've grown old since you went away. People don't sing much as a rule when they are sixty."

The girl wheeled about on the music stool and shook her finger at the covered clock.

"You have done this," she said. "You pretended to be sitting up there doing nothing all these years, but you've proven to-night that you're up to your old tricks, running away with the years."

The sisters laughed again.

"You used to stand and talk to that clock when you didn't come up to the drops of the weights, Amy," said Hulda.

"We've a long account to settle," Amy answered, shaking her head. "To come home and find you both so quiet, and complaining of growing old, when we used to have such good times! Shall I get some knitting and sit down in the corner and grow old, too?"

Hulda rolled up her work, and stood up.

"I suppose we do seem changed, child," she said, anxiously. "What can we do to amuse her, Jane?"

"Don't mind what I say, dears. You are so pretty and picturesque sitting there in those high-back chairs by that grand old fire-place. I'll get my sketch-book and make a sketch of you."

"We might dance the minuet," said Jane, standing by her sister's side. "That used to amuse her greatly when she was a child."

"O, do!" cried Amy. I'd forgotten about your doing that."

She turned to the piano and began the merry music of the minuet. Daintily the two little old ladies stepped forward in time to the music. Their small faces at first were grave with the desire to please, but presently the melody entered their hearts. Their faces lost the dull line of years, and shone with the pleasure of youth.

Jane's hair fell out of coil and hung in soft silver curls about her face. Hulda picked up her skirts and tripped airily away, showing her trim little feet in blue embroidered slippers.

"You do it even better than you used to!" Amy cried, clapping her hands as the music came to an end. "I never saw any one more graceful and pretty than you two are! Sixty isn't old! Why, you could go to Washington and be the belles of the season yet, if you only wanted to! You have just stayed here in the country, and you haven't any idea how lovely you are."

The sisters looked at each other and smiled. Jane slipped her hand into Hulda's.

"We haven't been discontented, or I suppose we would have made venture out into the world," she said.

"I wish you would make a venture this winter," said Amy, seriously. "There is no need of our staying here. Uncle James says he has invited you repeatedly to come to Washington. I said I'd stay all winter, but I don't believe I can, it is so lonely."

"We have never been lonely," said Hulda, after a short silence, "but of course we've always had the thought that you were coming to live with us when you finished school. It will be different when you go away this time."

Amy ran and threw her arms around them.

"It is a beautiful home, dears, and you know I love you both as though you were my mothers, but it so still and solemn here, and you know I haven't been used to it."

"We might recite her some of the plays, Hulda," said Jane.

"What plays?" asked Amy eagerly.

"Yes, I'm sure that would amuse her," said Hulda. "I hope you don't think, Amy, that we are women who settle down and spend all our time and mind on our work."

The two left the room, and Amy was presently surprised by their returning dressed in costume. With the first lines she knew that they were dressed to represent Portia and Nerissa. With surprising ability in recitation and action they went through the well known scene from the "Merchant of Venice."

They could not have had a more appreciative audience.

Amy recalled them again and again with a storm of applause.

The two little ladies had used the years of their solitude and leisure in learning from beginning to end a number of the plays of Shakespeare, and for amusement had bought several chests of costumes, and before the long mirrors in the drawing room had acted many parts together.

When they again appeared to Amy from an inner room they were in the costume of Rosalind and Celia in the forest of Arden. So perfect was their presentation of this part that it certainly entered the borderland of art.

"Bravo!" cried Amy in great excitement. "We'll not go to Washington; we'll have Washington come to us. We'll send a lot of invitations and have the gayest home party that was ever known in the country."

To this plan Hulda and Jane gave slow consent.

A month later every guest chamber in the fine old country house was occupied. The news of his sister's wonderful accomplishments drew the beloved brother in Washington to the home he had not visited for twenty years.

They were mostly the brother's friends and Amy's who made the place gay with laughter and song.

But one room was reserved for a guest whom Hulda and Jane had specially invited. It was late one evening after all the others had retired that he arrived. Amy was greatly amused and surprised the next morning when she met on the stair one of the nearest neighbors—an old gentleman who lived just across the country road.

"Why, Mr. Weston!" she exclaimed, "are you the guest of honor?"

He was a tall, handsome man with a most dignified bearing.

"I've always been an honored guest in this house," he replied, holding out his hand. "The girls thought I couldn't really be one of the party unless I closed my house and came over bag and baggage. Now, if you don't mind, Amy, just keeping it to yourself, let them think I'm a dignitary from some remote quarter of the globe, and they will appreciate me, but if they know I'm John Weston, who lives across the road, I'll figure for a simpleton."

"No, indeed, you wouldn't," Amy laughed. "You'll be the life of the party. I hoped you'd come over every day, as you always do, but it will be so much nicer to have you in the house."

Half an hour later, when the merry party had gathered at the breakfast table, the guest of honor was presented. No one had ever a truer gift of conversation than John Weston. He naturally assumed the position of his long friendship with the family, and it was noticed that Hulda and Jane deferred to him in all things as though they were used to depending on his judgment.

The following day it was rumored that the sisters intended giving the balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet," in their first appearance before guests.

Amy had been out sleighing all the afternoon with a number of the young people, and had not known that her aunts intended representing these juvenile lovers. The drawing room was being set in readiness for the amusement when the party returned.

John Weston, acting as the stage architect, was hanging a painted screen against the winding staircase. "I'll have to run over home and get my screen with the woodbine," he was saying to the man who was assisting him.

There was a burst of merry laughter in the doorway.

"O, Mr. Weston, what are you doing?" Amy exclaimed, running forward. "Aunt Jane and Aunt Hulda surely can't act Romeo and Juliet!"

"Can't they? Wait till you see them try it. You heard me say that I live across the road, didn't you?" he added smiling at the young people who had followed Amy into the room. "Well, we need both houses to circle around in anyway."

With a girl on each arm John Weston presently went down the snow-beaten path and across the road to his own home among the evergreens.

"I asked Amy who lived here the other day," said one of the girls, "and she said: 'An old gentleman who spent all his time with his books. I've been so interested wondering what you were like. What made you keep it secret that you lived here?"

"O, just for sport. I didn't really expect to be able to keep it all through the month."

"But this is such a beautiful home!"

"There isn't a finer interior in the country," said John Weston proudly.

"Do you live here all alone?"

"Well, I'm over the way a great deal, and they are over here."

"O, how artistic!" the other of the girls exclaimed, as they entered the hall.

"You've been abroad. Only people who travel have houses that look like this."

"I have been in every country that I ever heard of," John Weston replied, smiling, "Now just roam around and make yourselves at home."

One of the girls wandered away, but the other sat down and fixed her bright eyes on the erect old man before her.

"Well, what is it, my child?" he asked.

"Will you think I am very rude if I ask you something?"

"No, indeed; you may ask me anything you please."

"Do you love both of them just the same?"

John Weston's face flushed like a boy's; smiling, he shook his head.

"Is that answer sufficient?" he asked.

"But how do you know? They are just alike. None of us can tell them apart."

"They are no more alike than you and I," he replied, gravely.

"I suppose I shall know which it is if I wait patiently," the girl said, with a pert little toss of her head.

"Never!" answered John Weston quickly, but if you live long enough you may know what friendship is when free from selfishness."

The guests gathered in the long drawing room that evening were prepared for nothing more than amusing melodrama. What could Jane know of Juliet's surrender of love? How could a little old lady of sixteen be otherwise than amusing as the ardent young Miss Montague?

The room was but faintly lighted when from out the garden thicket young Romeo stepped. His first words held his listeners' attention. "He jests at scars who never felt a wound."

If Jane and Hulda Wainwright had employed their years in earnest efforts to win the attention of an admiring public they could not have succeeded more completely than they had in private study for their own pleasure and improvement. The old house rang with applause as the scene came to an end.

This was the beginning of a series of entertainments. Surely a month like this had never been spent in the country. The sleighing was perfect. The wind had swept the river bare for miles. Every morning a party of skaters were seen gliding in and out between the wooded banks.

John Weston was the leader of outdoor sports. Skating was a pastime that he had clung to with the enthusiasm of his boyhood. It was good to see the hale old gentleman in his fur-trimmed coat and cap, gliding on before with an ease of motion that only years of river skating can perfect.

The mystery of untold love that hovered about him made him of continual interest to the young people. The girl who had dared to question him wove many pretty little romances, in which Jane and Hulda alternately appeared as heroines. She watched the sisters closely, hoping to read the secret in one of their faces, but the brown eyes of each bore the same gentle confidence whenever they spoke with their friend.

One evening, when the moon was full, several of the party had gone down the river to skate for an hour or two. The later hours were to be spent in dancing, and the drawing room was being put in readiness. While they were buckling on their skates Amy proposed a race.

"I'll race the party," said John Weston, "age against youth. If one reaches the bridge before me I'll pay any forfeit he may ask."

They rounded the wooded point, and were off for a clear half mile to the bridge. After the first few minutes the competition rested between two.

Amy and John Weston were speeding on together. Shouting and cheering followed them. The white arch of the stone bridge was but a few rods ahead! Now Amy was in advance, waving her muff over her head! A moment later they had reached the bridge and were resting in the shadow.

"Well, little girl, what is my forfeit to be?" asked John Weston, laughing.

"O," said Amy, breathing hard, "whom do you love best in all the world?"

"That isn't fair."

"Yes, it is," she laughed; "if you had won I should have paid any forfeit you asked."

"When you are as old as I am you will not make a jest of love. I'll pay my forfeit, but I'm disappointed in you, Amy."

He leaned forward and whispered the name in her ear, and then turned and skated under the arch of the bridge. The poor little victor flew after him.

"O, forgive me," she cried, clinging to his arm. "It was all in fun! I didn't expect you to tell me."

He put his arm around her as they still skated on, but made no reply. After a few moments they were overtaken by the rest of the party, and all joining hands, skated back up the river.

When the house was reached the dancing had already begun. Amy stood at one side, with John Weston's confidence heavy at her heart, watching her aunts in their pretty lilac silks as they glided by her. They seemed more alike to her than ever before. But she knew even better than John Weston how unlike they were.

She knew, too, how inseparable was their love for each other. It was like reading a story, unfinished and very sad, she thought.

But afterward in thinking about the near friendship the three enjoyed, and their life of steady and close interest, it did not seem so sad after all.

Before another year had passed the names of Jane and Hulda Wainwright were widely known, and their home came in time to be a Mecca to all artists and students of Shakespeare.

FAWN-COLORED PIQUE GOWN WITH BLUE RUCHES FROM HARPER'S BAZAR.

Blue and a certain shade of fawn, which are the dominant notes of color at present, combine to form a pretty pique model which is equally desirable for foulard, nun's veiling or cashmere. A novel feature of the waist is the trimming of festooned ruches, a revival of an old-time fashion. It is an imported fancy, consisting of pleated frills of ribbon which are fringed in the weaving—a tiny fringe on each edge—and a cord is also woven in for drawing it into any fulness or design. The yoke, now an almost universal feature of dress, is of corded white linen lawn, an accompaniment to the smallest of gigot sleeves, which have three tucks on the upper arm and frills at the wrist. The corsage, broadened by shoulder revers, is crossed to the left of the skirt in a continuous effect. The skirt is of circular cut, and is trimmed to imitate an overlapping front with a rounded corner. Its width is three yards and three quarters. The yoke is in pointed form at the back. The belt ribbon is of velvet. The proper cut of the gown can be obtained, only from the cut paper patterns published by Harper's Bazar, where it appears.

Quantity of material—Pique, 20 inches wide, eight yards; ruching, 10 yards; linen lawn, 3½ yards.

Eager for any old Thing

Youth's Companion: A distinguished musician was waited upon one day in his study by a rather seedy-looking stranger, who said to him, with what seemed to be genuine emotion:

"May an humble brother musician claim your sympathy for one moment? I don't ask you to give me anything, but will you lend me a dollar or two? You can command $10 a lesson, or as much more as you choose to ask, while I think myself fortunate if I can get a pupil now and then at a half dollar sitting."

"My friend," said the other, touched by this appeal, "perhaps I can help you better than by lending you money. What is your branch of music?"

"I give lessons on the violin."

"Well, we will see what you can do. Here is a violin. I will sit down to the piano, and we will play a duet."

He whipped a fine violin out of its case, handed to the stranger, seated himself at the piano and placed a sheet of music before him.

The caller rasped the bow across the strings, leaned forward, looked at the composition and shook his head.

"Sharps?" he said. "Sharps? I never play in sharps!"

The distinguished musician took the violin from him, replaced it in its case and coldly remarked:

"My friend, what you need is a job as nightwatchman in a soap factory."

"Will you get it for me?" eagerly asked the caller.

REACHED AN UNDERSTANDING.

Ready and Anxious to Go to the Front, but Wanted His Place Saved.

Chicago Tribune: "I've got to go to my regiment, Millie," said the impetuous youth. "That's all right enough. I'm not afraid of war, and I am willing to go, but——"

"But there are other fellows that ought to go."

"To be sure. You ought not to have to fight alone."

"You know what I mean, Millie. There's Jim Higgintop."

"What has Mr. Higgintop got to do with your going to war?"

"Nothing, except that he doesn't go."

"Well?"

Roy Roughrider rose and stood before her.

"Millie Svackhammer," he said, in a deep, rich, David Ward Wood voice, "when a young man turns his back on all that is dear to him and goes forth at the call of his country to fight its enemies, to suffer the hardships of camp life, to undergo all the perils of a campaign in a tropical country, hunger, exposure, wasting fevers, venomous insects, deadly reptiles, tornadoes, earthquakes, and no cream in your coffee, and knows that a smug, dough-faced rascal of a Jim Higgintop is staying here at home and making love to his girl, I tell you it's pretty dog-goned tough!"

"What is it you want, Roy?" asked the young woman, much moved by his fervid eloquence.

"I want you to promise me not to permit that wall-eyed pike of a Jim Higgintop to come snooping around this house while I am away, risking my life for my country and feeding on canned goods——"

"Roy," impulsively spoke the maiden, "do you think I could ever care for that empty-headed squirtgun so long—so long—why, Roy,"—and she pretended to busy herself in examining the fastenings of the top button of his coat—"I think more of a pair of your old boots than I do of the whole Higgintop family!"

"My angel!" rapturously exclaimed the young man, clasping her to his heart. "I will send a pair of my old boots around to-morrow!"

BLAMES THE GOOD BOY.

A Chicago Parrot that was Taught bad Words by Wicked Urchins.

Chicago Chronicle: Out in Indiana avenue a pious, crochety maiden aunt of uncertain years has a troop of vigorous noisy nephews, who rather resent being held in check by the old woman's constant objections to their games. Her pet aversion is a romping child, and her solace and confidante is a huge green parrot, more than commonly clever and quite as pious as herself. She trained the bird, and is proud of the length and number of Bible verses Polly can quote.

The cage hung in a large window near the corner of the lawn, where the boys play "nibs." Last week, when the days were warm enough to have the windows open, the aunt was horrified to discover that Polly was paying considerable attention to the parlance of the ring, and was already proficient in many of its expressions. Accordingly she banished the youngsters from the yard and forbade them to use the place again. The boys resisted, and begged her to hang the parrot in another window. She steadily refused, however, and they were obliged to play elsewhere.

Later in the day the aunt decided to go to Austin for a visit, and left her parrot to the care of the servants. Thereupon, the boys, who had confided their grievance to the coachman and obtained permission to play marbles in the stable yard, immediately returned to their ground beneath the window. Polly watched the game with interest and the boys determined to have some fun at their aunt's expense.

Leaving their game, they went indoors and proceeded to initiate Polly into the various mysteries of "nibs." When she had learned "knuckle down" and how to "shoot from taw," her attention was trained upon craps and at this point the assistance of the coachman was called in. After an hour's careful labor she could screech "seben come leben" and "craps."

Then one of the boys suggested that when the old lady returned she would immediately suspect them of having taught Polly and advised they command the bird not to betray them. So they drilled her in the following:

"Polly, who taught you to say 'craps?'" "Billy Burdick."

Billy is the particularly "nice" boy next door, beloved by the aunt and detested by the boys. Polly learned her lessons admirably, and three days later, when her owner returned, she proceeded to display her new English with much pride. The old woman almost fainted and instantly began an investigation, confidently expecting to catch her nephews in some new mischief.

"Polly, who taught you to say 'craps?'"

"Billy Burdick," answered Polly, as pert as ever.

The boys outside the window listening to the inquisition could scarcely restrain their glee.

Bill Burdick was immediately reprimanded by Polly's mistress, and, of course, as promptly disclaimed all guilt. This left the aunt in a quandary, not knowing whether to doubt the word of the boy she had always held up to her nephews as a model or to accept Polly, her immaculate Polly, as nothing better than an ordinary depraved bird like the rest of the parrots. While she thinks it over the boys play marbles in peace and the coachman's lips are sealed.

THIS IS A GOOD SAMPLE.

An Illustration of What Married Life is Like. Reproduced for the Benefit of June Brides and Benedicts.

"Are you going to take baby out in his carriage this afternoon, Jack, dear?"

"Why don't you take him, love?"

"Let's bofe tate 'im."

"All right."

"Let me wheel 'is oozy sweetsy, Jack."

"I'll wheel him, precious."

"Jack."

"Well, dear?"

"I'm afraid you'll tip him out; why don't you be more careful at the crosswalks?"

"I guess you'd better wheel him."

"There, 'ie naughty popper would almost tipsy zis baby out, wouldn't 'e?"

"Oh, the baby was all right."

"You're careless, Jack."

"Probably—look out for that baby, Mollie! You're almost tipping him out yourself."

"I am not."

"Well, you were."

"Well, he climbs up on the side of his carriage and I can't do anything with him. Baby, if you don't sit down you'll be taken straight home!"

"He isn't to blame; you don't manage him right, anyway."

"I manage him all right when you aren't around."

"I guess you had better take him out alone hereafter (as the baby makes a desperate attempt to hurl himself over the side of the carriage.) Great Scot! Are you trying to murder the child?"

(The baby cries loudly.)

"Jack, I think you are just as mean to me and baby as you can be. I never have one single bit of trouble only when you come out with us and make it just as disagreeable and frighten baby half to death and make him cry, and you are cruel to him, you make him afraid of you shouting at him that way and he never tries to get out of his carriage when people don't grab at him every time he moves, so now—"

"Sh! For heaven's sake look here, if you're going to try to give any curtain lectures to me you needn't do it on the street! Everybody for a block around is looking at us!"

"You're (has recourse to handkerchief) you're the most cruel husband and unkind father I ever——"

"Keep quiet, will you!"

(Moody silence of some duration, during which the baby is wheeled rapidly toward home.)

"I wasn't fit to be a father or to get married, anyhow. I wish to blazes I was single again."

"Jack, I wish you wouldn't talk to me at all."

"It's the last time I'll ever come out with the kid, any way."

(Another silence.)

"Jack."

"Well."

"Baby stays in his carriage good now."

"Very fine."

"Jack."

"Well."

"Don't be cross."

"I didn't mean to be."

"But you were."

"Was I."

"Awful."

"Well, I was provoked."

"Jack."

"Yes."

"You do love baby, don't you?"

"Why, yes."

"Jack."

"Yes."

"Will you forgive me for being cross?"

"Yes."

"And you do love me, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

"Isn't baby sweet, Jack—see him now!"

"Yes, he's popper's baby boy."

"O, Jack, 'e's ze nicest, bestest may—we couldn't live without him, could we, Jack?"

"Not much!"

"And Jack!"

"Yes, dear."

"We'll take him for a good long ride to-morrow, won't we?"

"Yes, my love!"—F. L. in New Haven Register.

Settled an Old Grudge.

From On-a-Man-of-War: An old man-of-war's man took a seat in a passenger car one day, attracting considerable attention by his dress and manner. An indiscreet neighbor ventured the question: "In the navy, eh?"

The sailor nodded affirmatively.

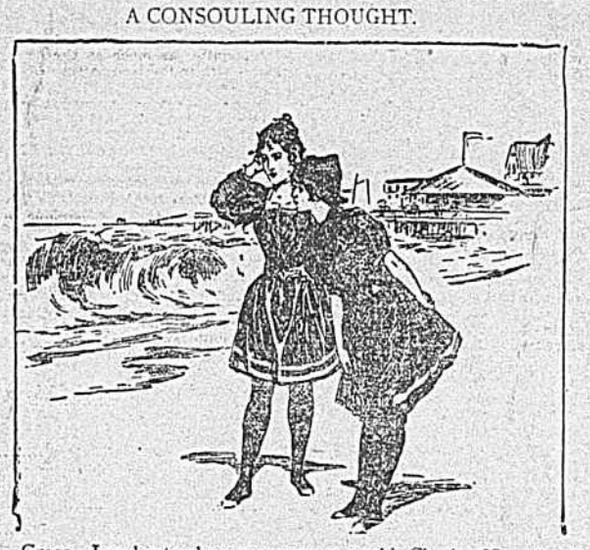
"Well," went on the other man, "I am not exactly in the navy myself; I am a contractor—that is, I furnish cheese to the navy."

"Oh, you are, are ye?" said the sailor. "You are just the chap I've been looking for," and accordingly he knocked the aspirant for naval honors over the car seat, and added as he looked around, "now show me the son-of-a-gun that furnishes butter."

The Girl Left Behind.

Washington Post:—Captain Sigsbee isn't the only Washington man whose room is littered with tokens of appreciation from the clever fingers of the fair sex. Half the young men about town are receiving daily contributions of bed slippers, sofa pillows, whisky flasks and necktie cases. Farewell photographs fill Uncle Sam's mail pouches, and amulets and lockets have beome the fad again. When the girls are finally persuaded that a haversack won't carry two sofa pillows and a dress suit case, they will unanimously adopt the latter mode of exchanging tender remembrances, and half the boys in blue will wear Trilby hearts strung about their necks with strings of baby ribbon.

A CONSOULING THOUGHT.



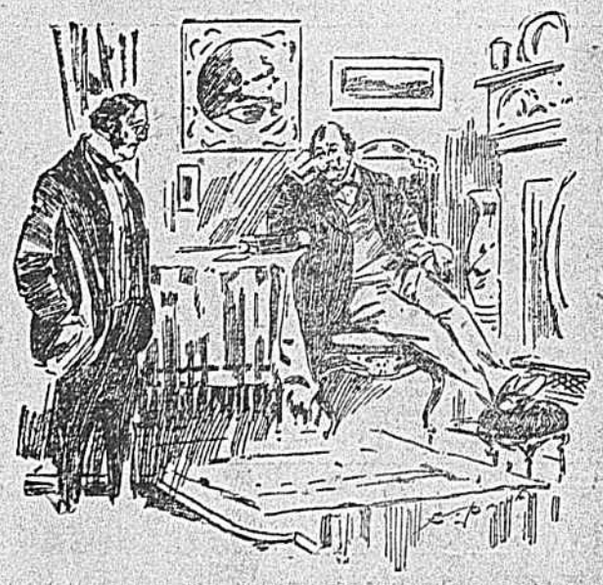
Grace—I understand your engagement with Charley Heart is off, and you have dismissed him for good.

Belle—Yes, that is true.

Grace—Well, never mind, dear, there are others.

Belle—That is what Charlie said when I dismissed him.

INEXPERIENCED.



Mr. Inquisitive—What is the difference between sunlight and gas light, professor?

Professor—Evidently you have never paid a gas bill.

FROM THE SUBLIME.

He—Darling, will you share my lot?

She—Is there a mortgage on it?

FORGERY.

Howsoe—What's in a name?

Comsoe—My father got ten years for one.

AMMUNITION.

She—What do you do with the biscuits I give you for lunch?

He—Send them to General Miles.

MARINE NOTES.

Claud—I suppose Miss Quiver sailed through her song beautifully?

Maud—No, she broke on the upper notes.

Claud—Wrecked on the high C's, eh!

A CAREFUL COUNT.

Brother—Has Count Lookoutski shown his affection for you in any way, as yet?

Mable—Oh, yes, he has subscribed to both Bradstreet's and Dun's